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ABSTRACT

The Far West Laboratory Model (Far West School) in downtown Oakland, California, an employer-based career education program of experiential learning, has focused on the developmental issues of how high school academic requirements and career exploration in the community can be integrated into a common set of learning activities, and the virtues and liabilities of a highly individualized curriculum. Thirty volunteer students from Oakland high schools participated full time in the 1972-73 program that drew mainly on the use of resource persons, large employer organization resources, and community and supplementary resources as instructional activities. Each student's learning program primarily was planned, focused, and documented by means of projects. The developmental program produced many learning options in which to acquire career information, personal and social skills. Future study and work is needed in the transition area of students leaving a highly structured, controlled environment and adjusting to one requiring extensive personal initiative and responsibility. (EA)

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EMPLOYER-BASED CAREER EDUCATION: THE DEVELOPMENTAL YEAR AT FAR WEST SCHOOL

by

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Introduction

> One of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of a keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional modes of education.[1]

Somewhere in America's history we began to think of education as something that happens only in the school. If it were true that persons learn only in the school environment, the great emphasis on the school experience is justified. Perhaps our society has placed more emphasis on formal schooling as a means for achieving social progress than has any other major society in history. As a result, we probably have the world's most elaborate and effective system of formal education.[2]

U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sidney P. Marland, questioned the effectiveness of this system when he noted that of the 3.7 million young people who left formal education, nearly 2.5 million lacked the skills adequate to enter the labor force at a level commensurate with their potential and their expectations. In 1970, 850,000 dropped out of elementary or secondary school; 750,000 graduated from high school general curricula; 850,000 left college without a degree or completion of an organized occupational program. These people represented an educational outlay of $28 billion -- about one-third of the amount

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[1]John Dewey, Democracy and Education, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1916, p. 10.

[2]James W. Guthrie and Edward Wynne, New Models for American Education, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1971, p. 230.

spent on education in 1970.[3]

In an attack on this low level of educational productivity, Marland directed the U.S. Office of Education and the National Institute of Education to facilitate a new approach to career education. Four alternative conceptualizations or, more accurately, four alternative ways of facilitating career education goals emerged. These alternatives should ultimately make an empirical contribution to shaping and further defining career education. In a research and development sense, the four models may be viewed as alternative means of delivering career education.[4]

The four alternative models are:

1. An employer-based model designed to provide an alternative education program for students 13-18 years old by integrating academic and vocational curricula and by extensively involving public and private employers.

2. A school-based model designed to develop and test K-12 career education programs.

3. A home-based model designed to provide career education to adults with the home as the learning center.

4. A residential-based model designed to provide career education with appropriate health, family, and economic development services to disadvantaged families.

This paper will be limited to a description of the employer-based model developed and implemented by the Far West Laboratory

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[3]Sidney P. Marland, Career Education--A New Frontier. Speech delivered at the conference of Pennsylvania Personnel and Guidance Association, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, November 14-15, 1971.

[4]Keith Goldhammer and Robert E. Taylor, Career Education: Perspective and Promise, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, Ohio, 1972, pp. 6-7.

for Educational Research and Development in 1972-1973. This model was non-formal (student learning accivities occurred mainly in the community, outside the formal school environment) and in effect was a "school without walls."[5]

Employer-Based Career Education (EBCE)

The Far West Laboratory Model, known as the Far West School, is one of four employer-based career education programs funded by the National Institute of Education.[6] The other three programs are being developed by: (1) Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, Portland, Oregon; (2) Research for Better Schools, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and (3) Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Charleston, West Virginia.

Far West School

The Far West School is located in downtown Oakland, California, on the eighth floor (top floor) of a business building near the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART) and bus lines. Volunteer students were recruited from high schools in Oakland and participated full time in the program. Each student retained official registration in the Oakland public high school from which recruited and received a diploma from that school upon graduation from Far West School.

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[5]Articles by Sidney P. Marland, Jr. ("Career Education: A Report") and Harold Howe II ("Remarks Regarding Career Education") in the NASSP Bulletin describe the models. The entire issue of this journal is devoted to career education. Vol. 57, No. 371, March, 1973, pp. 1-10, 40-51.

[6]The four career education models (employer based, school based, home based, and residential based) were transferred from the U.S. Office of Education to the National Institute of Education in the fall of 1972.

The student body consisted of 2 sophomores, 18 juniors, and 10 seniors for a total of 30 in 1972-73. Student characteristics generally reflected the Oakland high schools in terms of racial composition, sex, academic achievement, and future plans. Selection, however, was biased in favor of those students who had demonstrated in some past experiences an ability to accept responsibility and to take initiative.

An agreement between Oakland Public Schools and Far West Laboratory identifies responsibilities for each organization. Specifically: (1) Far West School is responsible for maintenance of student records in accordance with the Educational Code of California; (2) Oakland Public Schools is responsible for awarding of diplomas to students who complete their high school education through the Far West School program; and (3) Oakland Public Schools and Far West School are jointly responsible for the acceptance of employer-based career education as fully qualifying a student for graduation.

This alliance allayed the early concerns of many individuals and organizations about the completion of graduation requirements as well as potential competition between Oakland high schools and the Far West School. Representatives from participating business organizations wished neither to compete with the public schools in education nor to damage the excellent working relationship between the public schools and the business community developed over the years.

Purpose of the Program

> A major premise underlying EBCE is that direct association with working adults and employer organizations and direct involvement in adult activities can improve the career preparation of high-school age youth.[7]

The purpose of the program was to develop educational experiences for high-school age youth that would enable them individually to: (1) choose careers that are compatible with and capitalize on individual interests, aptitudes, and values; (2) acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to pursue chosen careers successfully, including entrance and advancement in an occupation or profession; and (3) acquire decision-making skills that permit career analysis and change as personal values and needs change and as external conditions may dictate.[8]

The primary instructional strategy was to blend or integrate academic and career-related activities. Career choice and preparation were viewed broadly to include not only occupational-specific skill training, but also growth in knowledge and in the personal, social, and intellectual domains of human experience.[9]

Far West School Curriculum

Educational goals were designed to insure that all students who left the program would have many options, including entering the work force with a marketable skill, receiving more technical training, or going on to college.

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[7]Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Prospectus: Employer-Based Career Education Program Operating Plan, FY 1974, San Francisco, California, April 13, 1973, p. 7.

[8]Ibid., p. 3.

[9]Ibid., p. 4.

At the minimum, a student must have completed the requirements as specified by the Oakland Public School System to graduate. To meet career requirements, the student upon graduation should be able to demonstrate his abilities to:

1. Identify goals and objectives that are appropriate for his perceived present and future career interests.
2. Demonstrate that he has acquired skills and knowledge that will enable him to attain his immediate objectives upon graduation.
3. Demonstrate that he has learned the skills of information gathering and decision making that will facilitate attainment of his long-range goals.

Four essential growth areas for students were identified:

1. Personal competence
2. Social competence
3. Cognitive (intellectual) competence
4. Career/life competencies.

These growth areas were further defined in terms of goals and objectives which provided an initial structure upon which to build a curriculum. This initial set of working objectives, with guidelines suggesting how to attain the objectives, were expanded, rejected, or modified as experience and analysis demonstrated the need to do so. This approach, labeled the "Emerging Far West School Curriculum" provided the flexibility necessary (1) to individualize learning programs for each student based upon his own interests and capabilities, and (2) to find out how much could be learned from resources in the community.

There was no single guide or model available for replication. Individual interests of enrolling students were unknown as were their academic skills and aspirations. In addition, shifting the responsibility for learning from the classroom to the actual work

setting required extensive involvement of resource persons and management representatives in planning and implementing curricula. The curriculum had to be dynamic for the program to be responsive to the unknowns and to exploit the experience and knowledge acquired from the combined efforts of students, staff, resource persons, and organizational representatives.

Curriculum Resources

Instructional activities consisted of four sets of resources:

1. Resource persons
2. Large employer organization resources
3. Community resources
4. Supplementary resources

The following sections will discuss purpose, rationale, success, and problems in the use of these varied resources during the 1972-1973 school year.

Resource Persons

R.S. Peters, the philosopher, claimed the aim of education was:

> Judgment...the final flower of much experience. But such experience has usually to be acquired in the company of a man who already had judgment..., subtleties in an educational situation are usually caught rather than taught..., those who acquire them are drawn by some sort of attraction towards a particular practitioner of an act or mode of thought, who functions as an exemplar to them. And so skill and judgment are handed on from generation to generation, each master contributing his individual increment to the common stock.[10]

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[10] R.S. Peters, Ethics and Education, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1956, p. 60.

The Resource Person concept was developed to allow for a modeling experience between a volunteer adult who would share occupational know-how and seasoned knowledge of the real world in a one-to-one relationship with an interested student. The relationship was voluntary on both sides; its scope, terms, and duration negotiable--possibly a week to several months--depending on the time and skills of the resource person and the educational needs and interests of the student.[11]

More specifically, the objective was to develop and test an association in which the major values of nonformal education could be transmitted to youth and one in which a resource person could enjoy the challenging experience of assisting an informed and maturing young adult move into the adult world. The job and life style of the resource person was the vehicle for structured interaction.[12]

Guthrie and Wynne see the student-adult relationship as the opportunity to give youth an appreciation of the controlling role of nonacademic values in the world:

> To suggest to the youth the subtle, implicit, moral, and personal concerns that must govern the control and assessment of personal conduct.
>
> To give him the background to absorb better the extensive book learning that may be before him in school and life.

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[11]Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Career Education: A New Partnership in Learning for Life, San Francisco: A publication describing employer-based career education by the Far West School, Fall, 1972.

[12]James W. Guthrie and Edward Wynne, New Models for American Education, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1971, p. 233.

> To permit him better to estimate how he will fit into the adult world and, thus, to be more patient about the irrelevancies of formal education that may be ahead.
>
> To give him some grasp of adult negotiating skills, so he can more effectively alter irrelevancies he perceives in the system.[13]

The resource person concept is not new. Reflection on one's own maturing process or observation of maturing youth will reveal the process. Almost any person who attains adequate growth has, at some stage, associated with and learned from effective adults. Guthrie and Wynne state that the matter is too important to be left to coincidence, the personnel department, or chance; that it should occur at an appropriate time; that the current process in its natural state is too effervescent and often too brief; that it is considerably hampered by obsolete job structures; and that "credentialism" aggravates the process by foolishly grounding many job distinctions on book learning or narrowly defined experience.[14]

One-to-one learning between an adult and student with shared interests was the cornerstone of the curriculum and the learning process, blending the academic requirements with career exploration.

In 1972-1973, 111 adults representing 75 organizations volunteered to share their knowledge and skills with interested Far West School students. Of the total 7,789 hours that students spent in learning activities spring semester, 2,131 hours (27 percent) were spent with adults in one-to-one learning activities.

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[13]Ibid., p. 233.

[14]Ibid., p. 234.

Matches were made on the basis of student needs and interests; therefore, many resource persons were utilized infrequently, some not at all, while others were in steady demand. Less than half of the resource persons available met with students. One attempt to use resource persons more efficiently was to develop numerous pre-designed projects. Each project consisted of learning objectives, suggested activities, and possible contributions of named resource persons along with other resources which will be described below. These projects were available "off the shelf" for student use or as models for those who wished to create their own. Over forty resource person learning opportunities were analyzed for use in various pre-designed projects to meet graduation requirements.

Large Employer Organizations

Large organizations, arbitrarily defined as those with 100 employees or more, were enrolled to disseminate basic knowledge about organizational goals and objectives, intra-structural relationships, and occupational information to Far West School students. One-to-one learning opportunities between an adult in these organizations and a student were offered as follow-up investigations for individually interested students.

Four organizations representing over 1,000 occupations developed a broad range of activities which provided career information as well as skill and training opportunities.

For example, an organization which conducts tests on blood and tissue samples for hospitals in Oakland developed learning activities for use as high school life science equivalencies. In addition to academic content, resource persons in the organization provided

information on occupations, job opportunities, prerequisite skills and training, and opportunities for student personal and social growth through interaction with adults currently working in this field. A secondary outcome of these activities was for both employers and Far West School staff to acquire experience and knowledge on how to match student needs and interests with organizational resources.

The use of large employer organizations as learning resources is strongly supported by Coleman who states that:

> ...education can appropriately take place only in the economic institutions of society--those organizations behind whose doors adults vanish while the child vanishes inside the walls of the school. Such education could not be hit-or-miss, merely placing a young person on the job, or in an apprentice situation. It would be necessary to carefully lay out the skills that were necessary to learn...This would involve, of course, more than one institution outside the school.[15]

The Far West School staff learned that each organization had many subtle characteristics which influenced student learning. Considerable skill was required to develop educational opportunities that efficiently exploited the learning environment without taking advantage of organizational employees or violating their sensitivities.

Community Resources

In addition to resource persons and large employer organizations, there were other nonformal learning opportunities in the community. Many of these resources have long been used by teachers

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[15]James Coleman, How Do The Young Become Adults? Center for Social Organization of Schools, the Johns Hopkins University, Report No. 130, 1972, p. 13.

(e.g., universities, hospitals, airports, museums, fire departments, volunteer tutors, volunteer service organizations, governmental agencies, etc.). Individual and small-group activities were organized for Far West School students using these resources. These activities did not require a resource person (one might be identified in the visitation, however). The resources included economic institutions and, therefore, contributed to exploration in several career fields.

One hundred fifteen (115) community resources were identified for use in the Far West School curriculum. Seventy-seven (77) were analyzed for potential learning activities. Spring semester students spent approximately forty-three percent of their time in activities associated with these resources. Of the forty-three percent, approximately one-half of the time was spent in hands-on work activities, including voluntary service.

Community resources represented a rich array of learning opportunities which required minimal effort to develop for use in the curriculum. When integrated with other resources into educational projects with clearly defined objectives and activities, they added a dimension to learning beyond that available in formal classrooms or in the economic institutions of our society.

Supplementary Resources

The resources described thus far were outside school walls. Other resources were also used. These supplementary resources supported the transition from reliance upon traditional curricular materials and instructional methodology (formal education) to extensive reliance upon resources in the community (nonformal education). To take advantage of all available educational opportunities,

materials and instruction were made available to students which prepared them to exploit the learning opportunities in the community.

A small collection of standard and programmed texts, audiotapes, films, general reference books, motivational literature, and career publications was made available at the Far West School. This collection was primarily designed to stimulate interest in reading and provide general information about careers. It was found that unless the materials were incorporated into the projects as part of the learning experience, they were used infrequently.

Other activities consisted of specialized workshops to help the student through what might be termed "freedom shock." Workshops designed to orient students to Far West School resources and to provide planning skills helped students make the transition from the highly structured, closely supervised school environment to a highly individualized environment requiring extensive personal initiative and responsibility. Workshops were also used to meet the basic education requirements specified by Oakland Public Schools and the State Department of Education.

Formal classes in the public schools were not entirely abandoned. Some opportunities provided by the public schools can not be found at a comparable cost in other agencies. Examples are driver training and military training (ROTC). Students continued in a school-based activity if it met a need and was cost-effective relative to alternative methods.

Courses at local community colleges were used to meet program needs for instruction in subjects required for entry into employment or higher education. They also provided the opportunity for students to explore the college environment.

Approximately twenty-five percent of the total hours students spent in learning activities during the spring semester were in formal classrooms, e.g., workshops at Far West School, classes in community colleges, and classes in other organizations in the community. This percentage of classroom time was expected to diminish as additional individualized instructional resources were organized in the community and as strategies for integrating academic knowledge and skills with career knowledge and skills were perfected.

The following sections will describe how curriculum resources were organized into individualized student programs and how these programs related to the other parts of the Far West School.

Planning, Integration, and Support Activities

Except for workshops and formal courses taken at Oakland schools or community colleges, each student's learning program was planned, focused, and documented by means of projects. The project was the mechanism which assured that each student was engaged in purposeful, planned, and documented learning activities--individualized according to his interests, needs, and abilities while aimed at broader curriculum goals and objectives.

During 1972-1973, it was found that many students had difficulty planning what they wanted to learn. Many were more interested in starting with resources and activities--with what they could be doing out there and with whom--rather than with what they could be learning.

To make students rigorous curriculum developers for their own learning programs, it was necessary for them to have various levels of involvement in the community. The most basic, or orientation

level, allowed the student simply to become acquainted with resource persons and organizations in order to discover what could be learned from them and whether he desired to explore further. Two succeeding levels of involvement, exploration and in-depth investigation, required that students spell out their objectives in advance (see Curriculum Sequence Model, next page). Students were encouraged to engage in orientation activities at one or more sites before being required to focus their projects.[16]

The process of planning and implementing students' programs consisted of diagnosing the students' educational needs, interests, and career and educational goals; student program planning and implementation; student progress monitoring; content integration and support of the learning process; and credit assignment.

Student Diagnosis

Diagnostic data gathered the first few weeks of the program on students' interests, abilities, career goals, and educational needs provided the preliminary information for project planning. It was found that information acquisition procedures were more time consuming than anticipated. Absence of complete student information reduced the quality of decision making in the initial planning process. Updating information in the students' files through progress monitoring was found to be essential for effective student program revision and replanning efforts throughout the year.

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[16]Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Employer-Based Career Education: Operation Plan, FY 1974, San Francisco, California, p. 110.

CURRICULUM SEQUENCE MODEL

ORIENTATION

PURPOSE - To acquaint student with an employer organization or with a career subject area and with a Resource Person so that he/she/student may become aware of needs and can reasonably decide whether he wants to explore the organization/area or personal relationship any further.....

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES - Visits, guided tours, meeting resource persons, asking questions, reading background material, viewing related films, etc.

EXPLORATION

PURPOSE - To provide student with sufficient experience in an employer organization or career/subject area to analyze it against his own interests, abilities, and values so as to:

1. develop self-knowledge through seeing self in a variety of situations....
2. evaluate organizations/areas in terms of own short and long range goals....
3. evaluate own characteristics and abilities in terms of current goals....
4. identify competences he needs to develop to achieve goals...
5. decide whether he desires to seek in-depth experience or develop proficiency in an organization or subject/career area.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES - Accompanying resource person as he goes about his tasks, interviewing people in the organization, learning about horizontal and vertical relationship between persons and functions, selecting a particular problem for research or study, reporting & discussing his findings and impressions, gaining limited hands-on (ride-on) experience in representative tasks or problems, reading supplementary material, viewing films, pursuing related studies.

IN-DEPTH EXPERIENCE

PURPOSE - To provide student with sufficient experience in an organization or career subject area to develop generally useful knowledge and skills (competences) necessary for personal, vocational, or educational goals and to build a reservoir of experience in a variety of situations upon which to draw in problem-solving.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES - All of the preceding activities plus on-the-site training in and more intensive personal involvement in performing productive tasks and assignments (possibly for compensation), intensive study of related materials.

[17] Ibid, p. 111.

Student Program Planning Procedures

Long-term Planning Procedures

Early in each semester, the student and advisor worked together to develop or revise the student's long-term (semester and year) goals and plans. The process was one of comparing where the student was--his interests, values, career and educational goals, current levels of achievement, and courses and credits completed--with where he wanted to be. Working together, student and advisor determined what the student wanted to learn, what skills and knowledge he should develop to pursue his current career interests and educational goals, what courses and credit equivalencies he needed to meet Oakland graduation or college entrance requirements, and what careers he might profitably explore in clarifying his goals. They then developed a plan using resources available for accomplishing these goals for at least a semester period.

Short-term Planning Procedures and Project Planning

Once a student had formulated his broad goals and identified generally how he planned to achieve them, he and his advisor began to plan in greater detail the activities, objectives, and implementation schedule. Student projects were the outcome of this planning effort. Projects identified the specifics: What was to be learned; what needs and/or interests would be met; who would be involved; how and when necessary arrangements would be made; what costs, special materials, time, prerequisite knowledge and skills (if any) were required; and what learning outcomes were expected and how it would be known when the objectives were achieved.

Student Progress Monitoring and Replanning

Each student met with his advisor at least once every two weeks for the purpose of reviewing the schedule, activities, and progress, identifying problems encountered, and devising appropriate solutions to those problems.

Advisors monitored student progress and problems through telephone and personal contact with resource persons and large employer representatives and through discussion with students.

Integration and Support of the Learning Process

As a student's project develops, he must be allowed to refine and modify his objectives, broaden or narrow his scope, follow new leads and insights, incorporate some emerging interests, and possibly discard some original ones. This flexibility must not distract from continued investigation of genuine interests and diagnosed needs. A critical function of progress monitoring was to provide the student, on a regular basis, with the kind of feedback that helped him make sense out of what he was doing and learning in the community; a process of consolidating and clarifying his experiences, of reinforcing and further stimulating his learning.

This integrative process was developed and performed primarily through a communications workshop. While this workshop was able to help some students consolidate their experience, other students, as could be expected, did not respond.

Credit Assignment

The aim of Far West School curriculum was to develop a performance-based instructional system so that students were rewarded for what they learned rather than how much time they put in. However,

the absence of objective criteria by which to compare and evaluate students' progress and products led to the use of a modified time-based formula for credit assignment. The continuation school in Oakland uses a formula in which fifteen productive hours of work (hours in the classroom or on the job) converts to one credit and ten credits equals one Oakland schools Carnegie unit. This formula was adopted by Far West School with the modification that the hours spent in activities must be substantiated by products developed by the student.

Since all credits earned at Far West School had to be translated into Oakland high school credits and courses, a major problem was determining how many credits to assign to which courses. For example, a project may have involved interviewing people in the community and writing news articles on political events while working closely with a newspaper reporter who had volunteered to be a resource person. Such a project would have resulted in credit in three Oakland high school courses, e.g., English, Government, and Career Exploration. Assignment of credit was the responsibility of a committee consisting of the student's advisor, a representative from Far West School administration, and a representative from curriculum development. When appropriate, the student was invited to supply additional information. The results were then given to the student who had the opportunity to further negotiate with the committee.

All student credits assigned were accepted by the Oakland Public Schools.

Conclusion

The 1972-1973 developmental year produced literally hundreds of learning options for Far West School students to acquire career information, personal, and social skills while meeting high school graduation requirements.

The positive response of resource persons and large employer organizations in curriculum development and implementation provides strong support for the continued use of these resources to educate youth. Acceptance by Oakland Public Schools of the learning experiences for credit toward graduation further demonstrates the viability of nonformal educational resources to meet formal academic requirements.

The problems of "freedom shock" experienced by students leaving a highly structured and controlled environment to one requiring extensive personal initiative and responsibility are only partially understood and resolved. Considerable work remains to be done in this area.

Summary

This paper describes the 1972-1973 Far West School's employer-based career education model of experiential learning, emphasizing direct involvement of students with adult activities. Use of nonformal educational resources in the community to meet high school graduation and career exploration requirements through a set of prescribed and individualized activities is described.

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